

NGA Center for Best Practices
Three Branches Institute on Adolescents in Foster Care:
Increasing Permanency, Reducing Entries

Wisconsin Project Summary Report and Strategic Plan

Improving Outcomes for Adolescents in Out of Home Care

In June 2011, the Department of Children and Families (DCF) was awarded a grant from the National Governors Association (NGA) to reduce placements into out-of-home care and increase permanency for adolescents in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems. The NGA project is intended to be a collaboration among the three branches of government.

Both nationally and in Wisconsin, adolescents in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems present unique and complex challenges. In Wisconsin for the past five years, approximately 450 teens in out of home care each year never transitioned to a permanent home with a biological parent, an adoptive parent, or relative before leaving out-of-home care. Instead these youth “aged out” of the child welfare or juvenile justice system at age 18 or 19 while still in out-of-home care. Youth who age out of the child welfare and juvenile justice systems are at higher risk than their peers of a range of adverse outcomes, including unemployment or underemployment, homelessness, teen pregnancy, lack of a high school diploma or GED, and incarceration.

The NGA project began with an “institute” held in Denver in July 2011 for Wisconsin and the other four states selected for the project. The following team from Wisconsin representing the executive, legislative, and judicial branches attended the institute:

Eloise Anderson, Secretary, Department of Children and Families
Freda-Elle Bove, Administrator, Division of Safety and Permanence, DCF
Julie Majerus, Policy Advisor, DCF
Margaret Carpenter, Administrator, Division of Juvenile Corrections,
Department of Corrections
Senator Mary Lazich
Representative Samantha Kerkman
Honorable Christopher Foley, Milwaukee County Circuit Court
Michelle Jensen Goodwin, Director, Children’s Court Improvement Project

At the institute the state team learned from national experts and colleagues in other states about specific barriers to permanency for adolescents and best practices for addressing those barriers, and engaged in facilitated discussion to identify goals for improving permanency for adolescents in out-of-home care in Wisconsin. The four goals identified by the state team are:

- Reduce the number of youth exiting without legal permanency
- Increase placements of adolescents with fathers and relatives
- Safely reduce the number of youth entering care for the first time at age 12 and older.
- Accelerate permanency for older youth

Following the institute, the team held a number of listening sessions with a broad range of stakeholders to obtain input on the barriers to improving outcomes for adolescents and strategies for overcoming the barriers. A total of 16 listening sessions were held in late summer and fall with the following stakeholders: foster youth and former foster youth in the child welfare and

juvenile justice systems; judges; attorneys; county child welfare directors; foster and adoptive parents; advocates; legislators; and providers. A full list of the listening sessions is included in Attachment A, as well as the focus group questions that were used during those listening sessions (Attachment B). A significant amount of information was gathered through the listening sessions and is summarized in Attachment C.

In October, the Department established a broad-based “home team,” composed of the eight core team members who attended the Denver NGA Institute and twelve additional stakeholders with an interest and expertise in serving adolescents in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems. The expanded team incorporated the following additional perspectives: former foster care youth; county human services director to reflect Wisconsin’s county-administered child welfare system; a service provider; the K-12 school system; state mental health system, and attorneys. The full list of the home team is included in Attachment D. The home team met three times including a one-hour conference call on October 17, and two in-person half-day sessions on November 10 and November 21. The team reviewed the input from the listening sessions and other background information. The team also received technical assistance from Susan Golonka of the NGA, who participated in the November 21 meeting and served as a resource regarding practices nationally and in other states. Through facilitated discussion, the team identified the most significant barriers to meeting the four goals (Attachment E), and the highest priority strategies to address the barriers. Based on its discussion and the information from the listening sessions and other sources, the home team developed the strategic plan included below.

The home team plans to continue meeting approximately every 4 months to monitor and support implementation of the strategic plan and address any new issues related to improving adolescent outcomes that merit attention. The commitment and vehicle for collaboration across this broad range of stakeholders is a new partnership spawned by the NGA Three Branch Institute on Improving Outcomes for Adolescents in Foster Care.

WISCONSIN STRATEGIC PLAN FOR IMPROVING OUTCOMES FOR ADOLESCENTS

GOALS:

- 1: Reduce the number of youth exiting without legal permanency by achieving a 10% reduction from December 2011 to December 2013
- 2: Increase placements of adolescents with fathers and relatives
- 3: Safely reduce the number of youth entering care for the first time at age 12 and older.
- 4: Accelerate permanency for older youth by achieving a 10% reduction from December 2011 to December 2013 in the median length of stay in out-of home care for youth 12 and older

	Barrier Identified	Initiatives	Timeline for Completion	Goals Expected to be Affected
1	Biological families are not engaged well enough as a resource for permanence, even though many older youth will turn to rely on them once they leave care	<p>1a: Codify procedures for trial reunification and concurrent planning into Wisconsin statutes and train stakeholders on these provisions</p> <p>1b: Provide intensive, in-home supports for adolescents during trial reunification and prior to first removal</p> <p>1c: Provide training and supports to courts to address issues related to improving permanency hearings, including the use of trial reunification and concurrent planning; improved youth consultation; and proper evaluation of whether original safety concerns are still present to prevent youth's return home</p>	<p>1a: Summer 2012 (codification); December 2012 (training)</p> <p>1b: June 2013</p> <p>1c: Fall 2012</p>	<p>GOAL 1: Reduce the number of youth exiting without legal permanency</p> <p>GOAL 2: Increase placements of adolescents with fathers and relatives</p> <p>GOAL 3: Safely reduce the number of youth entering care for the first time at age 12 and older.</p> <p>GOAL 4: Accelerate permanency for older youth</p>
2	Many case workers seem to lack specialized skills necessary to engage youth -- improved engagement will lead to a better likelihood that permanence options will be found	<p>2a: Strengthen targeted, skill-based training for frontline social workers to improve ability to engage adolescents and family</p> <p>2b: Strengthen trauma-informed care training for child welfare workers</p>	<p>2a: December 2012</p> <p>2b: December 2012</p>	<p>GOAL 1: Reduce the number of youth exiting without legal permanency</p> <p>GOAL 2: Increase placements of adolescents with fathers and relatives</p> <p>GOAL 4: Accelerate permanency for older youth</p>

Barrier Identified	Initiatives	Timeline for Completion	Goals Expected to be Affected
3 Foster parents and relative caregivers may not be adequately prepared to care for youth, which leads to greater instability in out-of-home placements for youth and decreased permanency options	<p>3a: Strengthen trauma-informed care training for foster parents</p> <p>3b: Create a database or website featuring foster families; including a photograph and family characteristics that would be of interest to foster children. By considering preferences of the children (particularly adolescents), foster family match is more likely to be successful.</p>	<p>3a: December 2013</p> <p>3b: June 2013</p>	<p>GOAL 1: Reduce the number of youth exiting without legal permanency</p> <p>GOAL 2: Increase placements of adolescents with fathers and relatives</p> <p>GOAL 4: Accelerate permanency for older youth</p>
4 Youth who have no other option but to exit to Independent Living (IL) do not do so in a manner that provides permanent relationships or other supports to achieve a smooth and successful transition to adult life.	<p>4a: Teach adolescents independent living skills at a younger age. Utilize homemaking and financial management training for youth through UW-Extension, to the extent possible. Also, assist foster parents with incorporating these skills on an ongoing basis</p> <p>4b: Increase support and services for youth who age out of foster care, including providing access to the state's transitional jobs program</p> <p>4c: Create/expand pool of community-based mentors for children who age out of care.(e.g., through community organizations, such as Rotary and service clubs, etc.)</p>	<p>4a: June 2013</p> <p>4b: December 2013</p> <p>4c: June 2013</p>	

NGA Three Branch Institute
Focus Groups on Permanency for Adolescents

Attachment A				
Improving Outcomes for Adolescents: Listening Sessions				
Date	Focus Group	Perspective	Location	
8/24	(2 groups - Faculty and Attendees)	Legal/Judicial		
9/15	Permanency Workgroup	Legal/Judicial/Agency	Madison	
9/16	WCHSA- Children, Youth & Families Policy Advisory Cmte	County Child Welfare Supervisors/Directors	Conference Call	
9/21	Secretary's Advisory Council	Advocates/Agencies	DCF Office	
9/30	Interviews with Crossover Youth	Foster Youth in CW and JJ		
9/30	Complaint Database	Juvenile Corrections		
9/30	Foster & Adoptive Parent Conference	Foster & Adoptive Parents	Kenosha	
10/6	WI Association of Family and Children's Agencies	Providers (RCCs/Group Homes)	DCF Office	
10/13	Legislative listening sessions with foster parents and youth	Foster Youth and Foster Care Providers	Racine/Kenosha	
10/13	Listening Session with legislators	Legislative	State Capitol	
10/13	Youth Advisory Council (Milwaukee)	Foster Youth	Milwaukee	
10/25	Site Visits, Foster Youth in Corrections	Juvenile Corrections		
10/25	Parole Agents	Juvenile Corrections		
10/29	Youth Advisory Council (Statewide)	Foster Youth	WI Dells	
11/11	Milwaukee Partnership Council	Child Welfare Advocates and Service Providers	Milwaukee	
12/8	Commission on Children, Families, and the Courts	Legal/Judicial	Madison	

Attachment B
NGA Three Branch Institute
Stakeholder Feedback Questions and Process

Key Feedback Questions

Introductory Information (Facilitator should begin with the following to help ground the discussion regarding specific outcomes for adolescent youth)

Adolescents in the child welfare system present unique and complex challenges.
(Facilitator choose one or more of the following data to guide the discussion)

- The length of stay in out of home care has increased sharply for adolescents. During the 2006-2009 period, the median length of stay in out-of-home care for a child age 12-15 increased by 66.32%. The median length of stay for children age 16-18 years is 380 days, over twice the median length of stay (155 days) for younger children aged four years and younger.
- Another disturbing trend is the number of teens never transitioning to a permanent home but instead aging out of the child welfare system at age 18 while still in out-of-home care. A growing proportion of youth in out-of-home care are remaining in out-of-home care until they are emancipated from the child welfare system at age 18: in 2006 the percentage was 13%, in 2009 the percentage was 17%.
- State re-entry data reinforces the need for attention to adolescent youth. In the period between April 2010 and March 2011, 27% of youth age 12-14 who entered out-of-home care had previously been in the child welfare out-of-home care system, and for youth age 15 and over entering the child welfare system this percentage was 39%.

Intro Questions: Does this data seem consistent with your practice/experience, or different from your practice/experience? How so?

Describe your experience working with adolescents and helping them to reunify with their families or otherwise find stable homes. What challenges do you face? [This question should be tailored to the audience. For example for judges, the facilitator might want to phrase the question as "Describe your experience presiding over child welfare cases involving adolescents, and directing the permanency plan or otherwise finding legal solutions to reunify them with their families or otherwise finding stable homes. What challenges do you face?]

Key Feedback Questions

Legal/Judicial Perspective

How effective is the system in serving adolescent youth at the front-end—identifying family resources, keeping them out of the system, connecting them to services, etc.?

What challenges have you seen or experienced that prevent you from effectively serving adolescent youth?

How could the child welfare, legal and judicial systems better work together to solve family/youth issues?

What developing trends or patterns have you observed that concern you with regard to achieving permanency for older youth?

What strategies have worked well to prevent adolescents from entering the system or to help them in achieving permanency? Are there specific efforts that could be expanded?

Do you have any other comments?

Legislative Perspective

What challenges have you seen or heard about with respect to effectively serving adolescent youth? (For example, challenges to preventing them from entering the CW system, finding them permanent homes, or connecting them with resources when they become independent?)

What laws create barriers for caseworkers and foster parents from effectively serving adolescent youth?

What developing trends or patterns have you observed that concern you with regard to achieving permanency for older youth?

What strategies have worked well to prevent adolescents from entering the system or to help them in achieving permanency? Are there specific efforts that could be expanded?

Do you have any other comments?

Juvenile Corrections Perspective

What are the biggest challenges for youth in Juvenile Justice transitioning from a secure correctional facility to an out-of-home placement setting?

How well do the child welfare and juvenile justice systems work together in addressing family/youth issues?

What strategies have worked well to prevent adolescents from entering the system or to help them in achieving permanency? Are there specific efforts that could be expanded?

Do you have any other comments?

Foster Youth Perspective

If you aged out of care without being placed in a permanent home, what did you find most challenging in living on your own?

What could the system (the child welfare agency and/or the court system) have done differently to help you more effectively?

What is your definition of permanency? What does permanency look like to you?

What do you see as the biggest barriers to achieving permanency for youth or helping them transition smoothly to adulthood?

Who currently serves as your support network, and how did you get connected with them?

What do you think the system could do better to prevent older youth from entering foster care in the first place?

What strategies worked well to help you achieve stability, or perhaps helped you from re-entering the child welfare system? Are there specific strategies that you wish social workers or the court system would use more often?

Do you have any other comments?

Foster & Adoptive Parent Perspective

What are the challenges/difficulties of being a foster parent to youth?

How can the system support you and your foster child more effectively?

What do you see as the biggest barriers to achieving permanency for youth or helping them transition to adulthood?

What strategies have worked well to prevent adolescents from entering the system or to help them in achieving permanency? Are there specific efforts that could be expanded?

Do you have any other comments?

Parent Perspective

How do you think the system could be more effective to help families reunify?

How could the CW system better help you to stabilize your life to become a strong parent for your child?

What do you think the child welfare system could have done better to help your child to find a permanent home?

What do you think the child welfare system could have done better to help you and your child so that your child could become an independent adult?

What strategies have worked well to prevent adolescents from entering the system or to help them in achieving permanency? Are there specific efforts that could be expanded?

Do you have any other comments?

Child Welfare Directors/Supervisors Perspective

How effective is the system in serving adolescent youth at the front-end—identifying family resources, keeping them out of the system, connecting them to services, etc.?

What challenges do caseworkers encounter in helping youth to achieve permanency or transition to adulthood?

What developing trends or patterns have you observed that concern you with regard to achieving permanency for older youth?

What strategies have worked well to prevent adolescents from entering the system or to help them in achieving permanency? Are there specific efforts that could be expanded?

Do you have any other comments?

Process of Gathering Feedback

- Schedule a date convenient for the stakeholder group (by end of October)
- Review questions before meeting
- Take 2 people along to the meeting (1-Facilitator (ask questions) and 1 recorder)
- Summarize key points from meeting by question within 48 hours
 - Send summary in word format to Julie at DCF
- Facilitator should be neutral and non-confrontational
 - There to gather feedback and explain the process, not provide solutions at this time
 - Note that a summary of the groups feedback and final product of the NGA process will be shared with each group
 - Asking probing questions when relevant (probing questions would be used to follow-up on an answer or get more detail from respondent)
 - Don't let one person or a few dominate session; may want to give participants 5 minutes to jot down their thoughts and do a round-robin

Attachment C

NGA Three Branches Institute on Adolescents in Foster Care Increasing Permanency, Reducing Entries

Qualitative Data Gathered from Focus Group Feedback Sessions: Barriers to Achieving Permanency or Reducing Entries for Older Youth

These comments were shared by various stakeholders at listening sessions held around the state.

The feedback is included here with minimal editing to ensure that all viewpoints are heard.

Statements are the experience and opinion of the stakeholder participants.

Adoption

Barriers

- Children choose not to be adopted after adolescence because they fear losing eligibility for Chafee (in WI, children adopted after 13 are still eligible)
- Potential adoptive parents are worried about legal liability
- Problems with Perception and Culture
 - Children sometimes prefer to not be adopted because they fear not being able to see their biological family
 - When the foster children are older the families see their liability differently (regarding adoption), whereas when they are younger the families have a harder time seeing the possibility of care continuing into adulthood
 - When a foster parent adopts a child with severe needs they are praised by the social workers – however, once that child ages (and is no longer in the system because of the adoption) social workers view the family in a negative light because that child would now pose a risk to other potential foster children
- There is a lack of post adoption resources
- Adoption can take too long when children are 16-18 years old
- The adoption process can be lengthy and involved
- Children who are exposed to multiple failed reunification attempts have a harder time adjusting to an adoptive family
- Adoptions can disrupt when the child reaches adolescence

Biological Family

Barriers

- Some biological parents say that they are unable to handle their children; they want the system to “fix” their children and then send them back
- Some biological parents aren’t aware of how to effectively advocate for themselves and their children
- Parents never learned how to parent; grew up in a dysfunctional environment and now they don’t know how to parent
- It can be challenging to identify biological fathers
- Biological parents often do just enough to prevent a TPR, but not enough to parent the child
- Biological parents aren’t provided with enough services when the children are removed from the home

Cultural / Societal

Barriers

- Economic issues have been problematic, and may have led to an increase in adolescents in care
- With email and text, kids never get away from the school/peer environment. Lack of protection of the home as a buffer
- Urban areas: tremendous growth of gangs/drugs; attract kids at this age
- Teenagers are unwilling to listen to adults
- Community is not accepting of the changes (i.e. therapeutic changes) that the child has made; children have a hard time not reverting back to their old behaviors or norms – the community must support these changes

Funding / Services

Barriers

- Funding to keep children out of the system (preventative funding) has been cut
- There are not enough treatment resources available to help get children returned to the home
- Difficulties in getting children with behavioral needs into the MA Children's Long Term Support (CLTS) Waiver. The CLTS waiver has three categories - autism, physically disabled, and mental health conditions. There are limited slots and the focus is autism/phys disabled, so not many children with behavioral health conditions get served under the CLTS waiver. In addition, the way the waiver functional screen is set up, children must have severe conditions that impair daily living since the waiver is designed to serve persons with long term support needs. Youth with bad behaviors and poor decision making skills don't qualify
- MA prior authorization restrictions on behavioral health day treatment services; apparently it is so difficult to get authorization that counties don't even try any more.
- MA is not paying for children to see behavioral health specialists; Medicaid will pay to see the local psychiatrist, but not to have the child evaluated by specialized providers; Fond du Lac County cited an example where they had to use county funds to pay for an assessment by Mayo specialists
- Counties are making greater use of the MA Crisis service that allows them to draw MA FED using their county funds, however, the MA Crisis service only covers short-term crisis stabilization services and not ongoing behavioral health treatment
- Money is often the driving force of choosing which services are used
- There is a lack of appropriate services, particularly evidence based services
- Children are often first seen in the system too late, with ineffective services and interventions
- Funding sources aren't consistent enough
- Need more resources to serve children at an earlier age
- Transportation to services is problematic for some
- Children need more help and information from social workers to obtain necessary services so that they can live independently

Funding / Services, continued

Barriers

- Many children face problems when they transition to adulthood, as they are placed at the back of the line for benefits
- Transitioning into adult mental health services is challenging
- Housing resources for children who age out of the system are lacking; a lack of housing support; unaware of tenant rights
- Homeless teenagers have very limited options
- Transition from foster care to aging out is difficult: financial troubles; lack of life skills; while there are some programs available there is a lack of what a normal parent would do for their child, such as paying bills and everyday things
- Independent living program does not offer much help in connecting youth to services
- When you leave foster care, you lose your support system
- Adult services have a lot of requirements and you almost have to have a child to fit the mold and qualify to get help

Suggestions

- Services should be evaluated more frequently
- Wraparound works well to coordinate services, and that model should be used more
- Collaboration between health services & wraparound services for high needs families
- Should consider the medical home system initiative; would improve access to mental health services in rural WI that are adoption/child welfare competent
- Supported employment would be a good thing; would help in developing relationships with employers
- Safe Families – Not necessarily foster homes, but a safe option for homeless teens (2011 Assembly Bill 30)

Judicial

Barriers

- So much happens prior to court (deferred prosecution, safety plans) so the court doesn't see what happens or know what is effective.
- Courts have a hard time coordinating with schools
- Courts struggle with overseeing the services that they order
- There isn't enough systemic coordination
- When 17 year old children are in the adult system, their services aren't appropriate (school, etc.)
- Not enough to just order services, court needs to provide frequent oversight of the effectiveness of services.
- Lack of communication between municipal court and circuit court
- Many children are running home after aging out and court system does not support these connections after TPR
- The length of time to TPR
- Judges, attorneys, and child welfare workers may all have different views on the appropriateness of TPR

Judicial, continued

Suggestions

- Possibly institute “treatment court” where children stay home and they come to a treatment court with social workers and mental health workers
- Maybe TPR reversal would be worthwhile if safety issues no longer present as a problem (once the child has aged out of care)
- When counties offer alternative treatment (drug court) for adults, are their outcomes better for children? Also, when counties have reduced recidivism for adults, are their outcomes better for children? If so, an emphasis on adult programs will also help adolescents

Policy / Procedure

Barriers

- Rules & regulations for children in care are problematic; for example, obstacles to obtaining a driver license put children at a number of disadvantages
- It is difficult to work towards reunification and independent living simultaneously
- How do we service this population if the system splits them up by different groups (CHIPS, JIPS)?
- The system can be a barrier (in terms of creative solutions) – example was given of a 17 year old girl who was put in an apartment because that is what she wanted and she was ready for it – will stakeholders take some risks?
- Foster care provides a level of protection so children aren’t in a position to learn certain skills
- Foster homes have been told that they do not have access to the mental health history of children in their care
- After aging out it can be extremely difficult to obtain a birth certificate – one former foster youth called the social workers and was told that they couldn’t speak to them – got the run around
- Children age out without a birth certificate, social security card, or state ID (all of which are needed to get work, and for a number of other reasons)
- At the age of 21 you can no longer get health care; workers don’t tell children that you need to reapply at age 18, and that it is cut off at age 21

Suggestions

- Use Alternative Response
- Foster care should be extended until 21 and from age 18-21 foster care should be independent living with a case manager (but the children should not be enabled to be lazy) – this would help build confidence
- Iowa does “dream teams” which are transitional meetings for children who are aging out, and the team includes family relationship managing; they also identify goals and who can help them meet those goals (can include the foster family helping the child); the youth identifies a team that essentially serves as their family and this team could include a biological family member (even a parent); also includes peer advocates

School / Education

Barriers

- Rules & regulations for children in care are problematic to participating in school functions (e.g. obtaining a driver license)
- There are challenges in getting approval for foster children to engage in school activities (when a permission slip is needed); schools should be made aware of who these children are (despite the requirements of HIPPA)
- School system: needs more background in trauma informed care – some schools are better than other – many teachers have good intentions but a lack of understanding of these issues can lead to problems, and children being disciplined when they don't fit the mold of the typical child
- DPI had a trauma informed care summit for Superintendents, but where did that go after they learned the information (did it get filtered down into the schools)?
- The school system should know the proper terminology and have a deeper understanding of foster care and child welfare
- Children in the system often move from school to school and this not only creates social difficulties, but it also makes it very challenging to maintain a high level of academic performance
- Children in out of home care don't consistently have someone to advocate for them when they are facing suspensions
- Issue of post-secondary education: children having a place to stay during breaks, important to consider that not all children are on this path, not many children make it past the first year which indicates that support for children in college may not be adequate
- College isn't for everybody, so funding for college students is helpful for those children who want to go to college, but for those who don't, they should get some comparable funding for starting their adult lives
- Adolescents caring for a child can't go to school; must work instead to pay the bills
- Hard to graduate from High School when you change schools every year
 - Often credits do not transfer from school to school (especially credits from in-house education at Group Homes)
 - Even if credits transfer, schools often have different graduating requirements. A child may be all set to graduate in one school, and then be transferred to a new school where additional credits are needed to graduate
 - Especially difficult to transfer credit for sports and volunteer work
- Hard to stay focused on education when you change placements, even if you are still in the same school, the transitional stress can affect school performance
- Youth in foster care are not adequately prepared for academics of college
- Stigma of being in foster care affects school performance
- One-time clothing stipend of \$200 is not enough to clothe a child. This affects youth's ability to fit in and feel comfortable at school
- Appropriate alternative education options need to be more readily available
- Liaisons are needed between schools and child welfare system (for example, homelessness liaisons have been very successful)
- Counties should hold peer-to-peer mentoring session for children in foster care so they know they are not alone and can help one another in school

Social Workers / Foster Homes

Barriers

- Some social workers have a hard time recognizing situations where out-of-home care isn't necessary
- Some social workers aren't able to recognize the difference between what safety is for younger children vs. what safety is for older children
- Many 12 & 13 year old children are on the cusp of chronic issues, and it is harder for relatives to say they will take the child at this age
- It is challenging to recruit foster homes, especially for adolescents
- The system can struggle, at times, with keeping siblings together
- Too many children are being informally and formally placed with extended family in other communities (primarily rural); families not getting enough support to manage the youth's behaviors; they experience burnout
- Relative homes are used for children and this does not provide the same level of pressure to find permanency
- Many families move around, and when they do the county agencies fail to provide consistency in services and case management
- It is challenging to engage youth in preparing for independent living
- Workers don't have the time to do the case work – would like to do a number of things with the children but can't due to lack of time
- There is a high turnover rate, which forces the children to work with a high number of case managers while they are in the system. This makes it more difficult for child to form meaningful connections.
- Many children are moved from home to home, and this creates even more instability for children
- Children report being abused in foster homes; many also report that their social worker did not believe them when they shared their abuse
- Foster parents can't have foster children who age out living in their home, because some of them have background issues which would prevent that family from caring for other foster children
- Would be more helpful if there was a way to train foster families in practical/useful ways to help children learn independent living skills (as opposed to just going through a curriculum)
- Foster parents are given so many restrictions on how they can parent the children in their care (e.g. children are not allowed to go to overnights with friends)
- Foster children aren't often told much about what is happening and why, which only adds to anxiety, fear, confusion, and behavioral problems
- The way removals are conducted can be traumatizing, they are done so quickly without providing information to the child
- Delays in assigning a social worker to authorize visits or other activities lead to delays in child maintaining connections with their relatives or other community relationships
- Youth are not involved enough in placement decisions; for example, change of placements are also often done without warning to the child or explanation of why
- Youth from both Child Protective Services and Juvenile Justice being placed together can lead to poor outcomes

Social Workers / Foster Homes, continued

Suggestions

- Need to help children to be their own advocates in the system and help them to see their choices
- Need a public education campaign to change the image of older foster youth
- Stability is important and more time should be invested in determining/maintaining placements; that lack of stability made it harder to gain stability as an adult
 - Improved stability in foster homes (reduction in number placements) will lead to stability in other areas (health care, education, friends, community connections) which will lead to improved permanency overall

Special Needs

Barriers

- There has been an increase in children born with autism; more likely to be abused and more likely to be in the system; behaviors interpreted as not being truthful (not looking in eye, repeating what is said/asked), higher number of divorces for parents of kids with autism, more out-of-home placements for kids with this diagnosis.
- The “uncontrollable” children are more severe than they once were
- Starting to see the effects of 10 years of using medication instead of relying on parenting to manage difficult behaviors
- Children who are TPRd and return to the county are often the most difficult children (high needs)
- What are the specific needs/characteristics for the children who age out? Are they tougher children to manage?
- The complexity of needs in some children is understated

Transitioning to Adulthood

Barriers

- Finances is the biggest barrier
 - Lack of transportation
 - Lack of employment
 - Lack of knowledge about financial management (e.g. how to budget for food and rent) – youth are not taught this in foster care
- Transitional Living Plan
 - Does not do enough to document the goals the child should seek to achieve upon transitioning to adulthood. The goals will be different for each child.
 - Needs to have better guidelines on independent living
 - Should start brainstorming with the child about this plan at age 17
 - Should include specific connections for child to contact when s/he needs help
- Age 17 too late to start teaching independent living skills - could start as early as age 11
- Very hard to establish real relationships, people you can count on once you are on your own

Transitioning to Adulthood, continued

Suggestions

- Develop a “halfway house” type program for youth to more easily transition into adulthood
- More peer-to-peer mentoring programs, beginning before aging out – connect foster children through picnics, Facebook, and other activities before they are on their own

Categories

- Adoption
- Biological Family
- Cultural / Societal
- Funding / Services
- Judicial
- Policy / Procedure
- School / Education
- Social Workers / Foster Homes
- Special Needs
- Transitioning to Adulthood

Attachment D
NGA Three Branches Institute on Adolescents in Foster Care
Increasing Permanency, Reducing Entries

Home Team

1. Eloise Anderson, Secretary, DCF
2. Fredi-Ellen Bove, Division Administrator, Division of Safety and Permanence, DCF
3. Margaret Carpenter, Administrator, Division of Juvenile Corrections, DOC
4. Hon. Christopher Foley, Milwaukee County Circuit Court
5. Michelle Jensen Goodwin, Director, Children's Court Improvement Program,
Director of State Courts Office
6. Senator Mary Lazich
7. Representative Samantha Kerkman
8. Julie Majerus, Policy Advisor, DCF
9. John Elliot, Deputy Administrator, Division of Safety and Permanence, DCF
10. Matthew Steigerwald, graduate student intern for DCF, UW School of Social Work
11. Christine Lenske, DCF Independent Living Program Director
12. Renee Roberts, IL Coordinator for DOC
13. Jeannette Deloya, Madison School District Social Worker Program
14. Amy Noble, Madison School District Transition Education Program
15. Lindsey Draper, Office of Justice Assistance
16. Raymond F Przybelski, Director, Portage County Health and Human Services
(WCHSA representative)
17. Crystal Lipek, former foster youth and member of State Youth Advisory Council
18. Joyce Allen, DHS Mental Health
19. Atty. Devon Lee, State Public Defender's Office, Appellate Office
20. Frank Gaunt, Chief Program Officer, St. Aemilian-Lakeside

Attachment E
NGA Three Branches Institute on Adolescents in Foster Care

Top Barriers/Issues to Increasing Permanency or Reducing Entries for Older Youth
Identified by the Home Team
11/10/11

- Need for Independent Living (IL) skills and supports
 - Start early in teaching IL skills
 - Teach those skills in an age appropriate manner
 - Youth driven transition plans that focus on the goals of the child (keeping in mind gender-specific and other considerations that may vary by child)
 - Foster supports and connections that the child can use after he/she ages out
 - Increase peer-to-peer mentoring supports
 - Strengthen training for foster parents to teach IL skills
- Strengthen connections between youth and their biological families
 - Build stronger connections before youth ages out of care
 - Include fathers and paternal relatives in family connections
 - Foster better relationships between biological family and foster family
- Social worker competency/engagement
 - Improve trust by youth in their social workers
 - Ensure caseworkers are trained in the differences in how to engage youth versus younger children
 - Translate the confusing language used in court into real terms that youth can understand
 - Keep in mind issues related to disproportionality
- Issues related to foster parent and relative caregivers
 - Provide training on trauma-informed care to caregivers
 - Provide supports to the biological home at reunification or removal
 - Increase relative recruitment and placements
 - Strengthen preparation for caring for adolescent
- Transitions to Adulthood
 - Provide youth with vital documents (e.g., birth certificate, etc.) needed for successful transition to adulthood
- Trial reunification to focus on permanency
 - Strengthen concurrent planning
 - Identify statutory changes needed in Chs 48 and 938
- Consider extending out-of-home care to age 21

Note: The group noted that the need for services to be trauma-informed affects all aspects of issues affecting permanency or entries into care for youth